**AI in education**

BY N E D A M U L J l 2023-05-04

IT would be an understatement to say AI has taken the world by a storm. Much like the pandemic, it is sweeping through countries and enmeshing itself in human lives at an alarming pace. No matter what the age or the education background, basic literacy and access to the internet are the only prerequisites to start learning from ChatGPT.  
  
It seems like the world`s greatest plagiariser, providing information from a range of sources within seconds and keeping its cards well hidden. Where is this content coming from and how do we judge the accuracy of the shared information? Yet excitement abounds as ChatGPT not only provides content but helps its users articulate themselves better than politicians and world leaders.  
  
Numerous questions have been raised about the potential damage that such language models can cause. Educators worry about the loss of creative and critical thinking skills, about dependence on information that is spoon-fed and the ethical implications of receiving realms of data that can be massively misused. A closer look at how AI functions will reveal that it is far from easy to glean information from any AI model without the skill of asking pertinent questions.  
  
It is no longer as important to have the answers, as it is to be able to ask the right questions. The race to success is for those who have learnt to extract relevant data, not those who necessarily know how to produce information. Knowing how to work with key words, staging research prompts, and applying the information received in lucrative ways serving the purpose that needs to be focused on are some of the skills an AI user may need to acquire.  
  
For students, this means oceans of content knowledge flowing freely, but for those who do not know how to organise information to serve their purpose, it may be an exercise in futility. However, language models such as ChatGPT may actually be a goldmine for subject experts who have faced hurdles in their career growth due to language barriers.  
  
Language models such as ChatGPT may revolutionise the world of opportunities for many, help ease the process of collating and presenting information, but it cannot yet teach us how to glean information.  
  
Just like mining for gold requires technical skills, using AI in education will demand a set of requisite skills. Most chatbots can offer personalised learning to users who know how to manoeuvre their way through. In fact, chatbots can offer much relief to teachers who have to patiently answer repetitive questions and can certainly help teachers fill the gaps intheir own subject knowledge.  
  
AI might not help people get smarter, but it certainly promises to speed up learning and provides effective ways that may help students bypass a teacher`s limitation to explain or clarify concepts. For those who feel AI education may take over teachers` jobs, it would help to evaluate the humanistic elements for which children go to school.  
  
The necessity of physical and emotional care, social interaction, guidance and connection may be hard to replace, perhaps for decades to come. AI will certainly enhance the learning experience, perhaps even make assessments redundant once freely accessible information starts filling need gaps, but the human experience may yet overpower the promise of infinite knowledge.  
  
At best, it could act as a valued teaching assistant, cost-effective and efficient, an assistant that won`t require training and will speed up processes as well as assessments. As the great AI wave sweeps global education, it remains to be seen how thegeneration of digital natives will use this valuable tool to impart the necessary skills and education to work on climate change, healthcare and poverty.  
  
Whether the digital revolution in learning bears the potential toclose gaps in inequality or carries the threat of further deepening the divide will depend on how it`s accessed and used.  
  
Barriers often come from resisting opportunity, and from a mindset that is bent on preserving the status quo. If those who have access to expensive private education are the only ones who are able to purchase AI apps, there may be little hope of addressing the opportunity divide.  
  
Whatever the case, AI promises to shift the focus from retention of knowledge to expanding the boundaries of it, providing skills to look deep into a subject by asking the right questions and not necessarily being limited by one`s ability to analyse. In fact, the analytical tools provided may advance innovation and growth much faster for those who had to get a team in place or outsource expertise. AI can help turn ideas into reality in unprecedented ways.  The wúter is wodóng as senior manager, professional development, at Oxford University Press Paldstan.  
  
neda.mulji@gmail.com Twitter: @nedamulji